

Groundbreaking, Basketball and VIP Galas *A Month of Serious Fund-Raising (and Not-So-Serious Absurdity)*



Clockwise from left: Abbie Friedman, Mayor Oscar Goodman and Lovee Arum at the groundbreaking at the future site of the Lou Ruvo Brain Institute; Vicki Fertitta and Nicole Ruvo at the groundbreaking for the Lou Ruvo Brain Institute; Brian Greenspun and Representative Shelley Berkley at the groundbreaking for the Lou Ruvo Brain Institute.

I love the absurd—observing it, living it, partaking of it. Absurdity prevents life from becoming mundane. Case in point: Recently I was fondling the two ropes of 100 multicolored Tahitian pearls from **Robert Wan** that I'd tied in knots around my neck as an ascot at the recent Power of Love gala benefiting Keep Memory Alive, and upon commenting to a friend that the strands were long enough to use as a dog leash, I decided to try it. Sure enough, ten minutes later I was walking my mother's little schnauzer, **Lola**, to the mailbox and back with a leash made from 200 pearls. Completely absurd, but the mental picture I'd created was enough to place a big grin on my face every time I think of it. But more absurdity in a bit (I'll come back around—I always do).

On the afternoon of Friday, February 9th, ground was broken on the **Frank Gehry**-designed **Lou Ruvo Brain Institute** at its future site as part of the new Union Park development in downtown Las Vegas. Following a brief cocktail reception at the **World Market Center**, the assembled—including the Honorable **Oscar Goodman**, Representative **Shelley Berkley**, **Camille** and **Larry Ruvo**, **Nicole**,



Lauren and **Brianna Ruvo**, **Tom Kaplan**, **Abbie Friedman**, **Vicki** and **Frank Fertitta, Jr.**, **Heidi** and **David Straus**, **Victoria Otter**, **Anna** and **David Robins**, members of Keep Memory Alive's board of directors such as Dr. **Zaven Khachaturian**, Dr. **Nancy Wexler**, **Rollie Sturm**, **Lovee Arum**, **Teresa Fertitta**, **Dan Otter**, **Maddy Graves**, **Jerome Snyder**, **Michael**

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Severino and **Kenny Epstein**, and assorted prominent citizens, muckety-mucks, Pooh-Bahs and movers/shakers—moved across the street to the dirt lot that will, in a couple of years, not only be a brilliant addition to the Las Vegas skyline, but also a world-class facility for research and diagnostics in the field of Alzheimer, Parkinson, Huntington, ALS

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Clockwise from above: Dan Otter and David Straus at the groundbreaking at the future site of the Lou Ruvo Brain Institute; Queen Latifah and Tracy Mourning, wife of NBA All-Star Alonzo Mourning, at the MGM Grand conference center for the Touching a Life Gala to benefit Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars and Communities in Schools; Cookie and Magic Johnson at the Touching a Life Gala.



and other memory disorders, undoubtedly affecting the quality of life for countless people. It was not only a historic day for Las Vegas, but also one that we can all certainly remember with fondness as a very positive step forward.

Here's where the absurdity comes back: After the groundbreaking, Nicole Ruvo and I decided to head to **Bishop Gorman High School** to attend the last basketball game to be held in the gym (dubbed the "House of Glory" in 1986 by famed radio personality **Seat Williams**; the building was built in 1954 with the rest of the original campus on Maryland Parkway). Anyhow, Gorman is moving in the fall to its new Summerlin campus, so this was a chance for me to glimpse a real slice of old-school Las Vegas. I really never experienced the kind of high school with a PTA and lockers (opting instead for a prep school in the woods of Connecticut with buildings designed by **LM. Pei**), so it was a bit surreal. As we walked in, there was **Nick Tanno**, who happened to be holding an extra pair of tickets (we'd just decided to go on the fly, and the game had been sold out for weeks). I'm not sure if he was planning on scalping them, but it was very, "Psst! Hey, buddy, you need seats?" Then we ran into **Milo Kostelecky**, just kinda meandering around (as Milo is wont to do). So there I was, holding my tangerine-colored BGHS T-shirt, walking the corridors of Gorman, and as we approached the cafeteria we ran into our friends **Evan Glusman**, **Frederic Aparcar**, **Bryan O'Reilly**, **Charlie Skinner** and **David Chesnoff** (it was kinda like eating at **Piero's** on a Friday night). Anyhow, after buying a slice and a soda, we made our way to the gym. But as

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we got to the door, the guy looked at our wristbands and informed us that we wouldn't be able to sit in the gym but would have to watch the game via closed-circuit television in the cafeteria with the JV cheerleading squad performing to the side of the screen! I thought he was kidding and was kind of thrown. You mean to tell me that I can

randomly show up with a half-dozen guys without a reservation on a Saturday night to virtually any nightclub in the world (be it **Bungalow 8** in New York or **Pure** in Las Vegas) and be shown immediately to a table in the VIP section, but at Bishop Gorman High School I'm given fever by the doorguy for trying to get a seat at a girls' basketball game? Seriously? That's genius! I started to pull out my wallet and see what \$20 would get me, but decided that the humor would be wasted. It was then that I realized that I am probably the very embodiment of everything that BGHS teaches its students to be wary of in life. It's pretty damned funny, if you think about it. And here's where the absurdity comes in: I'm having far more fun relaying this ridiculous anecdote than I ever would have had sitting through a high-school basketball game.

Meanwhile, am I the only one who has the background music playing at a number of Las Vegas' casinos become really good of late? Not too long ago, I was waiting for my car at **Wynn's** south valet when I was pleasantly surprised to come to the realization that the song I was bopping my head to was "Right in the Night (Fall in Love With Music)" by **Jam & Spoon**, featuring my gorgeous friend **Plavka** on vocals, and thought to myself, Hmmm...mid-'90s techno at the Wynn—how droll! Then, a bit more recently, I was walking through the Street of Shops at the **Mirage** on my way to the ASD/AMD Jewelry Show and found myself humming along to the ambient music—which in this case was "Poison Arrow" by early-'80s New Romantic synth-pop band **ABC**. Again, I mused how frightfully clever the musical



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programming has become around town, and how these individuals are to be commended. A lot of skill is required in programming ambient music—and it's a completely different school of know-how than being a club DJ. It requires a much broader field of music to draw upon, and the songs selected have to incorporate both the recognizable and the eclectic. And while one's venue is certainly important (Dame Shirley Bassey singing any of her James Bond themes is very in synch with Bellagio, for instance), this juxtaposing of rock, soul and funk with hotels appealing to a younger demographic is deliberate and well thought out. One can definitely assume that very little happens in Vegas by accident, so someone had to actually contemplate whether '80s New Wave would be germane to crowds of Gen-Xers playing the slots at the Mirage (apparently the answer is yes—and I couldn't be happier).

Sometimes life itself serves as a theater of the absurd, but it all comes together with fantastic results. The Touching a Life Gala held on Friday, February 16th, at the MGM Grand conference center was just such an occasion. The event, a kickoff



Clockwise from top left: Rosalina Lydster and Vivica A. Fox at the Touching a Life Gala to benefit Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars and Communities in Schools; Dr. Jeffrey Roth and Dena duBoef at the Power of Love gala benefiting Keep Memory Alive; Kevyn and Steve Wynn at the MGM Grand conference center for the Touching a Life Gala.

for the NBA All-Star Weekend, was sponsored by Behind the Bench/The National Basketball Wives Association, and benefited two wonderful local organizations—Greater Las Vegas After-School All-Stars and Communities in Schools. The evening, hosted by Queen Latifah, honored the philanthropic works done by Elaine Wynn, Cookie Johnson and Dikembe Mutombo. Neiman Marcus put on a runway show featuring the new Spring collections and accessorized the looks with precious jewelry from Bay Area designer Rosalina Lydster's popular Jewelry by Rosalina collection. Of course, it has always been a knee-jerk reaction of mine that whenever I see Elaine Wynn, I immediately think to myself, I wonder what Queen Latifah is up

to right now. That said, the affair was lovely and featured cameos by Vivica A. Fox (whom I hadn't seen since we kibitzed in the VIP section at the opening-night party of Whiskey Sky at Green Valley Ranch in 2001), James Pickens, Jr., of *Grey's Anatomy*, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, as well as a slew of NBA players. Now, here's where some more of that absurdity comes in: Not only was this event part of the NBA All-Star line-up, but it also happened to coincide with two occasions

to hit Vegas each year: the MAGIC apparel convention and Chinese New Year (despite common misconception, the traditional greeting "kung hei fat choi" doesn't translate to "Happy New Year," but rather, "Congratulations, and be prosperous"). As such, Queen Latifah capitalized on the moment and brought everyone into the Curvation Nation with a preview of her new signature collection for plus-sized women. Said Latifah, "Most women in this country are a size 10 or better, and it's like, c'mon. We are consumers. We are buying this stuff. Make things for us!" As her 1989 album instructs, All Hail the Queen! Attendees at the benefit included Elaine and Steve Wynn, Kevyn Wynn, Peter Early with his daughter, Marla (twirling with a proper pale-purple pashmina worn over her party dress, proving simultaneously that she has inherited her mother Gillian's fab fashion sense and that one is never too young to appropriately accessorize—brava!), Jane and Marc Schorr, Flintie Ray Williams, Dawn Hume, Denise Randazzo, Susan and Irwin Molasky, Lovee Arum, Dena duBoef and Dr. Jeffrey Roth, Jenna and Michael Morton, Rosalina Lydster, Bill Terry and Magic Johnson.

Next month I'll be coming atcha with a report from the United Jewish Community/Jewish Federation of Las Vegas' Champions of Freedom gala, as well as a preview of one of the most anticipated events on the annual philanthropy calendar: the luncheon to benefit the Nathan Adelson Hospice—this year featuring a fashion show by Chanel. And to leave y'all with something to nibble on in the interim, I close with the poetic words of the Bard: "And therefore take the present time, with a hey, and a ho, and a hey hey-noni-no, for love is crowned with the prime in springtime, the only pretty ring time, when birds do sing, Hey ding a ding, ding. Sweet lovers love the spring." ♠